



## **Community Social Care**

*Learning Disabilities and college life*

### **V/O**

Sue Hatton co-ordinates part-time provision for adults with a learning disability at Solihull College, and has assisted many young men and women with challenging behaviour to access a wide range of courses, including 28 year old Steven Valentine. Together with his key worker, Julie O'Neil, Steven has been successfully attending college for over two years. You will hear Steven, Julie and Sue discuss his progress, and the way the courses are managed. First, Sue explains why she has developed a strong commitment to the principle of normalisation.

### **Sue:**

I was writing my Christmas cards for all my students in different groups and I came to writing the cards for the guys in this ward in, which it was called then, in this institution, this hospital as it was called then, and part of me said well, what do I want to write them cards for, they won't look at them, they'll just eat them, or chew them, or chuck them away, or not notice them, what's the point? And that was actually quite a disheartening moment for me 'cos I felt, you know, some would say to me well either they are people or they're not people, and if what you do at Christmas is give your students Christmas cards, then that's what you do for all your students, so I gave them Christmas cards. They ate them, they chewed them, they chucked them, they didn't notice them, but in a sense that wasn't the point; a shift had been made for me, that I began to see them much more as real human beings and to, you know, look more closely at not all the problems that there were but what could be done, how, you know, how could we work together to improve life a bit, just a little bit.

### **Sue:**

You've been at college here now for how long – two years?

### **Steven:**

Yes, two years.

### **Sue:**

And what courses are you doing at the moment?

### **Steven:**

Cookery.

### **Sue:**

Yeah, and what else do you do?

### **Stephen:**

First Aid.

### **Sue:**

When you were at college last year what courses did you do then?

### **Stephen:**

Cookery and number work, computers, and

### **Sue:**

What did you use to make at college on a Wednesday last year?

### **Stephen:**

Pottery.

**Sue:**

There's a lot of personal rewards and sometimes it's like there for the grace of God go I. You don't know what life holds for you in the future, what life could have held for you, and I enjoy people like Steven seeing how he was before he came to us, or reading in his file on how we was before he came to us, his personal file, and working with Steven really closely for two years, and the person he is now. He's totally changed, in two years he's totally changed, it was never envisaged Steven would ever have home visits, it was never envisaged Steven would go out in the community.

**V/o:**

Steven hasn't always found it easy to concentrate on his courses but so far his patience and that of Sue and Julie has been rewarded.

**Stephen:**

This computer I think was hard, was really hard at the beginning, and I find it really easy now.

**Sue:**

So is it difficult to concentrate sometimes?

**Stephen:**

Yes, my mind will wander over there...

**Sue:**

But what's the most interesting?

**Stephen:**

What's the recipe for getting tins out of other people?

**V/o:**

Running the courses that Steven attends demands thoughtful and appropriate planning from both Julie and Sue. They formed a close working relationship to ensure that Steven gets the best out of his time at college.

**Julie:**

I go and visit, particularly if it's a new home, and there are several new small group homes, or if it's on the site of the old long-stay institution here, which has quite a wide range of services now working with lots of different people, I will go and visit, I'll spend time talking to the staff, meet the student, I will ask the difficult questions, you know – is there something you need to tell me, is there something that's going to make it difficult for you to work or be in the kind of mainstream environment that this college is, talk about the stress in the canteen and the numbers of people and that kind of thing. Where possible I'll ask the student as well, I will often invite them into college just to get to see the environment, and then if there's a particular class they want to go to, suggest that they go and look at that class first, with their own support, and then we will discuss what support is needed. And what I always say is what I'm trying to do this for is to enable you to succeed, to succeed in your learning, and want to set you up to have a successful learning experience.

**Julie:**

When you first stayed, what you do on a Tuesday – what do you learn to do there?

**Stephen:**

Learning how to stop the bleeding.

**Julie:**

Yeah, yeah, and what other things?

**Stephen:**

Put them in their arm slings and stuff.

**Julie:**

That's right and if someone's poorly and lying on the floor what position do you put them in?

**Stephen:**

Recovery position.

**Julie:**

Recovery position, well done, well done, that's right. So if you were at home and somebody had an accident and they cut themselves you'd know what to do, wouldn't you? So what would you do if somebody cut themselves on their finger or the hand?

**Stephen:**

Stop the bleeding and put a plaster on it.

**Julie:**

Well done, well done.

**First aid class:**

Right can you just listen for a minute, everybody listening, right you're doing the sling at the moment which is really, really good and it's the elevation sling, and just to remind you that the reason we're doing the elevation sling is because they've got a cut to their arm and it's important that we keep the arm up because what does that help to do with the bleeding? Can anybody remember?

It helps to stop the bleeding.

It helps to stop the bleeding, doesn't it? Do you remember we were saying about the heart – what job does the heart have in the body?

Blood.

What does it do with the blood? It pumps it round the body.

**Julie:**

What we had to do at first, we sat down in a very informal way and chatted about college courses and different courses on offer, and the guys would say oh I want to do this, or I want to do that, I want to learn to cook, and then we just broke it down gradually, then we worked on a one-to-one with all the guys, and they chose what courses they wanted to do, and they chose about ten courses I think which is impossible for them to do, and then we broke it down from there.

MORE OF FIRST AID CLASS

**V/o:**

Admitting individuals with challenging behaviour can give rise to concerns within the college. For Sue it's a matter of being alert, taking appropriate precautions and listening to her team.

**Sue:**

If you find a student who you find particularly difficult 'cos it's not always the student, it's your reaction to them, like I've got a situation at the moment with a young man who's presenting a real challenge and we've put in a lot of support, but the tutor is really, she's frightened of him, and even though even though others of us don't quite understand why, she is, and we have to accept that, and she shouldn't be put in that position any more, I don't feel, so I'm looking at possibly changing the class that he's in 'cos I think he can cope in college and perhaps another tutor. That's not to decry her at all, that's just the reality of the situation. There are times when I feel anxious, anxious about, you know there is the potential here for a major problem but that's, I think that's a very good thing to feel, and to notice, that's why it's important to visit classes and to remember and, you know, to go back over who we've got in, and how they're getting on, and to do the sort of reviews, and never to become complacent. What I most fear is a violent outburst which is going to damage another student in the group,

or a member of staff here, and so far in the last five years we've had incidents, I have had minimal sort of pain caused to a couple of members of staff, physical pain. Staff have certainly been frightened but that's what I want to avoid.

**V/o:**

Through his experiences at college Steven is gaining the skills he needs to develop more autonomy. Matching him with the right teaching staff has been crucial.

**Sue:**

What's very important is that people do have the understanding of the specialism and that they then develop the skills in working with adults and their learning difficulty. Primarily they're teachers of horticulture, cookery, whatever, and that those other skills develop. How we help those skills develop, obviously we run various staff training events that staff are welcome to come to, we have a team of learning assistants who are experienced, some of them very experienced in working with adults with learning disability who will go in and support staff where that's necessary, and that's as I say part of that preparation and risk assessment.

**Julie:**

Is there anything about college that you don't like?

**Stephen:**

No.

**Julie:**

You enjoy coming to college, don't you, except the early morning courses when you have to get up.

**Stephen:**

Yes 'cos I'm lazy, lounging in bed all day if I had the chance.

**Julie:**

What else do you like about going to college?

**Stephen:**

See friends at college.

**Julie:**

And you also like to, you learn things don't you, you learn new things?

**Stephen:**

Yes I do.

**Julie:**

You socialise with people?

**Stephen:**

Yes.

**Julie:**

And what do you get when you go to college? When you've done a course at college and you go back to where you live.

**Stephen:**

We have money.

**Julie:**

You have wages, don't you?

**Stephen:**

Yes.

**Julie:**

You do, and that's what you like, isn't it, you like to earn money and save it up.

**Stephen:**

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**V/o:**

The day care budget in Steven's home allows for his supervision at college. Julie is convinced it's made all the difference to his development.

**Julie:**

A lot of homes do not have a day care budget; a lot of homes and most of the service users access what they call SAC's, education centres where, in my opinion, the needs are not centred around the individual, they're centred round groups at a time. I much prefer where Steven lives where everything is centred around the individual's needs and their needs are catered for, and if any of the guys don't wish to access college, then they don't access college that day; they have the choice of whether they go or not.

**Julie:**

And what did you used to do on a Friday when you used to go outside working?

**Stephen:**

Digging.

**Julie:**

Gardening, didn't you? Horticulture. And what was your favourite course last year?

**Stephen:**

Cookery.

**Julie:**

Cookery? Why's that?

**Stephen:**

Because you get to eat it if you cook it, yeah.

**Julie:**

He's learning now to cook basic things so when Steven's living on his own he'll no how to cook, with support from somebody. And with the first aid as well he can also if he cuts himself while he's doing anything at home, and cooking, I think he'll know how to put a plaster on. I think it's just giving him a structure and it's teaching him how to live with people, how to work with people, and he feels he's a valued member of society now because he's accessing various things that "normal people" - in Steven's words - access. It's not because it's just a college for special needs, it's a college in the community that everybody has the opportunity to access, which is an achievement for Steven.

We've maintained the discreet provision because we believe it's right in order for people to get the right learning match to use, sort of current jargon, and they need to come in at that very, very basic level. That's not to say we don't encourage and support integration into all courses in college, which we do, and that's set out in our prospectus, and it's that the right learning match and people need some extra support, then they get that on whatever course is appropriate for them.

**Julie:**

Is there anything else you'd like to do at college? Any other courses you'd like to do?

**Stephen:**

Learn to be a mechanic.

**Julie:**  
Would you?

**Stephen:**  
Yeah.

**Julie:**  
Why's that?

**Stephen:**  
Self found interest in cars ....

**Julie:**  
Yeah, very interesting. Would you like a car one day?

**Stephen:**  
Yeah.

**Julie:** That's your future ambition, isn't it?

**Stephen:**  
Yeah, having a car.

**Julie:**  
Everyone in life deserves a chance to fulfil their ambitions. Steven's ambition is to have a job and he is more than halfway there to succeeding in that now. I have actually made enquiries on a part-time job for him and I'm just hoping something comes of that. It may only be half a day a week, or two half-days a week, but it's leading up to something he wants to do.

**Julie:**  
You're doing a new course, aren't you?

**Stephen:**  
Yes.

**Julie:**  
What's that called?

**Stephen:**  
I don't know, I meant to ask.

**Julie:**  
Planning Ahead, I think it's called, for the Future, isn't it?

**Stephen:**  
Yeah.

**Julie:**  
For independent living, yeah, yeah. What would ideally like to do in the future?

**Stephen:**  
Have a job.

**Julie:**  
And what else?

**Stephen:**  
A house.

**Julie:**

And be independent, wouldn't you.

**Stephen:**

Yeah.

**Julie:**

That's your ambition, isn't it?

**Stephen:**

Yeah.

**Julie:**

If you expect something of somebody usually they rise to those expectations and Steven has the ability to do that. In a sense the next step for him is his work preparation. I would hope that when the time is right and with the right support Steven may be able to find not necessarily a full-time job but, you know, to join the workforce which he really wants to do, and to be paid some money, and to feel that he is at last an adult.

**Julie:**

What else would you like to do at college?

**Stephen:**

Do an art course?

**Julie:**

An art course?

**Stephen:**

Mmm. Work in college.

**Julie:**

Oh you'd like to work in college, not actually do courses but get a job working in college – that's what you'd like to do?

Steven knows he has a learning disability. He talks about his learning disability. He knows he's not as quick as people when it comes to reading and writing and sometimes he knows he can't understand things. He sees normal people as having normal relationships – going to work, holding down a job, getting a good wage at the end of it, having a vehicle, getting married, having children – to Steven that is a normal life. He's seen it in his parents, in both of his sisters, and he hears staff talking, and that is what he wants, he wants a life that he sees everybody else has.

You get on really well with Sue, don't you?

**Stephen:**

I do, yeah. She asked me what the matter was and I told her what the matter was, and she said she'd sort it for me; she'd sort me out, out of trouble.